

FOOD CONTAINERS INCLUDING DENTAL CLEANING DEVICES AND OTHER PERSONAL CARE ITEMS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

5 This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application
No. 60/458,703, filed March 27, 2003, under 35 U.S.C. § 119.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The following disclosure relates generally to food product containers and, more
particularly, to commercial food product containers.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 A multitude of food product containers exists for selling and distributing various
types of food products. For example, some commercial food products sold in
convenience stores are enclosed in see-through plastic bags so that customers may view
the food before purchasing the product. In addition, food products sold for immediate
15 consumption at movies, sports events, and other venues are often sold in paper or
cardboard containers (e.g., paper bags, cardboard buckets, etc.). In addition to the
foregoing, fast food outlets typically place food products (e.g., hamburgers and French
fries) in paper bags or other similar containers for distribution to their customers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 The present invention is directed to food product containers comprising one or
more dental cleaning devices. Exemplary dental cleaning devices used in accordance
with the invention include, but are not limited to, dental floss, tooth picks, and plaque-
removing strips. The food product container may comprise more than one dental
cleaning device. For example, the food product container may contain at least two
25 different dental cleaning devices. The dental cleaning device may be disposed in a

packet. In some embodiments, a dental cleaning device, or a packet containing a dental cleaning device, is attached to the inside or the outside of the food product container. For example, a dental cleaning device, or a packet containing a dental cleaning device, may be releasably attached to the outside of the food product container. In other
5 embodiments, a dental cleaning device, or a packet containing a dental cleaning device, is securely attached to the food product container. In some embodiments, a dental cleaning device, such as tooth floss, is disposed in the food container.

In addition to the dental cleaning device, the food product container may further comprise one or more other cleaning devices, such as a hand towel or a face towel. The
10 food product container may also further comprise a breath freshening device, such as mints or mouthwash.

In some embodiments, the food product container also includes text, such as advertising text, or other textural or graphical messages positioned near the dental cleaning device. Similarly, a packet containing a dental cleaning device may additionally
15 include such text or messages. For example, the food container or packet containing a dental cleaning device may include advertising text indicating the source or sponsorship of the dental cleaning device.

The food product container may further comprise food at least partially held within the food product container. Exemplary foods include, but are not limited to, fast
20 food, such as popcorn, sandwiches, hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, etc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing aspects and many of the attendant advantages of this invention will become more readily appreciated as the same become better understood by reference to the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying
25 drawings, wherein:

FIGURE 1 is an isometric view of a food product container including a dental cleaning device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIGURE 2 is an enlarged isometric view of the dental cleaning device of FIGURE 1 and an associated packet in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIGURE 3 is an isometric view of a food product container and a dental cleaning device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.
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FIGURE 4 is an isometric view of another food product container having a dental cleaning device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIGURE 5 is an isometric view of a further food product container having a dental cleaning device in accordance with yet another embodiment of the invention.

5 FIGURE 6 is an isometric view of yet another food container having a dental cleaning device in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention.

FIGURE 7 is an isometric view of yet another food product container having a dental cleaning device in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention.

10 FIGURE 8 is an isometric view of yet another food product container having a dental cleaning device in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The following disclosure is directed to food product containers that may include teeth cleaning devices and personal care items for the convenience of the consumer. The following description provides specific details and an enabling description for a thorough understanding of embodiments of the invention. One of ordinary skill in the relevant art will understand, however, that the invention may be practiced without some of these details. In other instances, well-known structures and functions have not been shown or described in detail below to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the description of the embodiments of the invention.

20 Unless specifically defined herein, all terms used herein have the same meaning as they would to one skilled in the art of the present invention.

As used herein, the term "food product container" or "food container" refers to any container suitable for enclosing or supporting a food product, groceries, or other provisions, including, but not limited to paper bags, such as brown paper bags used at check-out counters at grocery stores or that can be bought in bulk, lunch bags, plastic bags, cardboard containers, foil containers, trays or other devices for supporting a food product, and candy wrappers. The term "food product" refers to any liquid or solid consumable product.

As used herein, the term "cleaning device" refers to any device used to clean parts of body that may be soiled after consuming a food product. For example, a "dental cleaning device" refers to any device used to clean teeth, including, but not limited to, dental floss, tooth picks, plaque-removing strips, pipe cleaner-type devices that can clean

between braces, tongue-cleaning devices, or sugar-neutralizing agents (solid or liquid). Other cleaning devices that may be used according to the invention include, but are not limited to, hand or face towels, which may be pre-moistened and which may have a cleaning agent pre-applied to them. The term "breath freshening device" refers to any solid or liquid device that can be used to freshen breath. Exemplary breath freshening devices include, but are not limited to, mints, mouthwash, and gum.

FIGURE 1 is an isometric view of a commercial food product 100 including a dental cleaning device 132 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the commercial food product 100 includes food 120 held in a container 110. For example, in one embodiment, the commercial food product 100 may include popcorn held in a bag or other container, such as served at a movie theater or other venue. In this embodiment, the container 110 can be fabricated from paper and/or cardboard materials, among others. In another aspect of this embodiment, a packet 130 holding the dental cleaning device 132 is releasably attached to an exterior portion of the container 110. The packet may be any kind of container, sachet, envelope, box, or other type of packaging suitable for partially or completely enclosing the dental cleaning device. The dental cleaning device 132 may be dental floss or a similar device configured to remove unwanted and annoying food particles, e.g., popcorn, from between teeth.

In yet another aspect of this embodiment, the packet 130 may be attached to the container 110 with an adhesive or other suitable bonding agent. Further, the packet 130 or the container 110 may include advertising or other textural or graphical messages. Such messages may include advertising slogans and other messages configured to foster goodwill or customer brand loyalty. Similarly, such messages may include popular trivia, quizzes, or other types of games. Although the illustrated embodiment depicts popcorn in a movie theater setting, in other embodiments, other types of foods and other types of food containers may include a dental cleaning device in accordance with other embodiments of the invention. Such food containers may include text, such as advertising text, or other textural or graphical messages positioned near the dental cleaning device. For example, the food container may include advertising text indicating the source or sponsorship of the dental cleaning device. Moreover, in other embodiments

the dental cleaning device, or a packet containing the dental cleaning device, may be attached to the inside of the container.

One feature of aspects of the invention illustrated in FIGURE 1 is that the dental cleaning device 132 is readily accessible by consumers of the food product 100 immediately after consuming the food 120. For example, in a movie theatre setting, the present invention enables a customer to quickly and easily remove annoying popcorn from between his or her teeth without enduring the distraction for the entire movie.

In a further aspect of this embodiment, the food product 100 may also include an additional cleaning device 136 attached to the food container 110. In one aspect of this embodiment, the cleaning device 136 may include a towel, such as a pre-moistened hand-towel having a cleanser pre-applied. In another aspect of this embodiment, such a cleaning device may be utilized after consuming contents of the container 110 to clean face and hands. In additional embodiments, the additional cleaning device 136 may be the same as or similar to the dental cleaning device 132. In other embodiments, the food product 100 may include three or more cleaning devices.

FIGURE 2 is an enlarged isometric view of the packet 130 of FIGURE 1 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the dental cleaning device 132, e.g., dental floss, may be hermetically sealed within the packet 132 prior to opening by the user. In one embodiment, the packet 132 may be transparent. In other embodiments, other types of packets can be used. For example, in one other embodiment, the packet may be paper. Accordingly, the present invention is not limited to clear plastic or paper packets, but rather, the present invention extends to any type of packet that can be attached to a food container to hold a cleaning device in accordance with this disclosure. As mentioned above, the packet 130 may be attached to the container 110 with a suitable adhesive or a fastener.

The present invention is not limited to the particular embodiment described above. Accordingly, in other embodiments, other dental cleaning devices may be combined with other types of food containers without departing from the spirit or scope of the present disclosure. For example, FIGURE 3 is an isometric view of a food product 300 including a food container 310 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the food product 300 may be a fast food item such as a sandwich, hamburger, or hot dog distributed to a customer in a cardboard box or other

container 310. In another aspect of this embodiment, the packet 130 may be attached to an exterior portion of the food container 310, such as a top portion as illustrated in FIGURE 3. Accordingly, persons buying food products at fast food restaurants and other outlets can utilize the dental cleaning device 132 after consuming their meal to provide quick and easy dental hygiene.

FIGURE 4 is an isometric view of yet another food product 400 having a dental cleaning device 434 configured in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the food product 400 may include a food 420, such as a pepperoni stick, beef jerky, or other similar item, removably enclosed in an airtight plastic or foil container 410. In another aspect of this embodiment, the dental cleaning device 434 may include toothpicks or other rigid or semi-rigid cleaning devices contained in a packet 430 attached to the food container 410. While toothpicks 434 are depicted in this embodiment, in other embodiments, other dental cleaning devices may be releasably attached to the container 410 for use by the consumer of the food product 420. For example, in another embodiment, the packet 430 may contain dental floss. In another embodiment, the packet 430 may include a combined dental floss/toothpick instrument. In yet other embodiments, other cleaning devices may be included. For example, a sugar-neutralizing food or liquid may be attached to a container comprising a sugar-containing food product, such as a candy wrapper.

In yet other embodiments of the inventions disclosed herein, other useful items may be attached to food containers for use by consumers of the food. For example, in another embodiment, any of the food containers disclosed herein may include packets holding breath mints or other devices for providing fresh breath after consuming the enclosed food product. For example, in one embodiment, two breath mints can be attached to any one of the food devices for consumption after the food has been consumed. In yet other embodiments, a breath-freshening liquid, such as a small vessel or container of mouthwash, may be attached to the food package for similar use.

FIGURE 5 is an isometric view of a further food product 500 contained in a package 510 in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, a packet 530 attached to the container 510 includes a first dental cleaning device 532 and a second dental cleaning device 534. In another aspect of this embodiment, the container 510 may hold food 520, such as beef jerky or another similar

food item that is prone to lodging between teeth during consumption. In a further aspect of this embodiment, the first dental cleaning device 532 may be dental floss and the second dental cleaning device 534 may include toothpicks. Accordingly, after enjoying the bag of beef jerky or other food, the user can access one or more of these dental
5 cleaning devices 532 and 534 to remove annoying pieces of food from his or her teeth.

FIGURE 6 is an isometric view of still another food product 600 having a container 610 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the food product 600 may include fast food, such as French fries and burgers 620, purchased from a fast food establishment. In another aspect of this
10 embodiment, a packet 630 holding at least first and second dental cleaning devices 632 and 634 may be releasably attached to the container 610. Upon consuming the contents of the container 610, the diners may elect to use either the first dental cleaning device 632 or the second dental cleaning device 634 to suitably clean their teeth. In addition, as mentioned above, the container 610 may also include pre-moistened hand wipes or other
15 hand and facial cleaning devices 636, as well as various types of breath freshening devices 638.

FIGURE 7 is an isometric view of another food product container 700 having a dental cleaning device 710 configured in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the dental cleaning device 710 may be
20 releasably secured around the rim 720 of container 700, from which it may be unwound by pulling on pull tab 730. In other aspects of this embodiment, the dental cleaning device is releasably attached to container 700 under a flap that can be opened to reveal the attached dental cleaning device 710. In further aspects, the dental cleaning device 710 may also be tucked into folds or creases at the bottom of container 700.

FIGURE 8 is an isometric view of another food product container 800 having a dental cleaning device 810 configured in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. In one aspect of this embodiment, the dental cleaning device 810 is be secured around rim 820 of container 800, allowing rim 820 of container 800 to be used to clean
25 teeth. Alternatively, the dental cleaning device 810 may be torn off the container 800.

In a further embodiment, a dental cleaning device, for example a piece of dental floss, may be loosely disposed inside a food product container. In one aspect of this
30 embodiment, a packet containing a piece of dental floss may be placed inside a food

product container. One example includes placing a toothpick or dental floss inside a box of popcorn.

One feature of aspects of the invention described above with reference to FIGURES 1 through 8 is that inclusion of the various personal items described above can foster goodwill with purchasers of the related food items. For example, if a customer has a choice between selecting a food product container, such as a bag of popcorn, that includes dental floss or other personal cleaning items, or selecting another food product container that does not include any such item, the customer may be inclined to purchase the food product container having one or more of the aforementioned personal items. By adding to the customer's convenience and enhancing the customer's experience, one or more of the inventions described above can be useful for developing brand loyalty or otherwise cultivating commercial sales.

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description in the following examples, the words comprise, comprising, and the like are to be construed in an inclusive sense as opposed to an exclusive or exhaustive sense; that is to say in the sense of "including, but not limited to." Words using the singular or plural number also include the plural or singular number, respectively. Additionally, the words "herein," "above," and "below" and words of similar import, when used in this application, shall refer to this application as a whole and not to any particular portions of this application.

The description of embodiments of the invention is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. While specific embodiments of, and examples for, the invention are described herein for illustrative purposes, various equivalent modifications are possible within the scope of the invention, as those skilled in the relevant art will recognize. For example, while certain features are presented above in a given order, alternative embodiments may include such features in a different relationship than that described above. For example, although one or more of the foregoing embodiments may illustrate a dental cleaning device or other item affixed to an exterior portion of a food container, in other embodiments, such items can be affixed to an interior portion. The teachings of the invention provided herein can be applied to other products, not only the food products described herein. For example, a tooth pick or dental floss may be attached to the stick used with caramelized apples or corn dogs or a tooth pick or dental floss may be taped or otherwise attached to the exterior or interior

(perhaps under the lid) of a Styrofoam food container having a compartmentalized base and integrally hinged lid commonly used at take-out delis or buffets. The various embodiments described herein can be combined to provide further embodiments. Further, aspects of the invention can be modified, if necessary, to employ the features
5 described above in yet further embodiments. These and other changes can be made in the invention in light of the above detailed description.

While the preferred embodiment of the invention has been illustrated and described, it will be appreciated that various changes can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.